



## ADVISORY NOTICE

No. 08-005

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**SUBJECT:** N-95 Masks for Respiratory Protection

**ISSUED:** 15 September 2008

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In response to recent questions regarding the respiratory protection afforded by N95 masks, the Division of EMS has prepared the following information to help EMS providers and services make informed decisions about the level of respiratory protection appropriate to their needs. The information contained herein is for informational purposes and is supplementary to the *RI Pre-Hospital Care Protocols and Standing Orders*.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) define an N95 respirator as a mask that filters at least 95% of airborne particles and is not resistant to oil. The N95 rating does NOT in and of itself correspond to protection against any specific hazards. Pathogen-specific ratings (i.e., against *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*) vary from one manufacturer and model of N95 mask to another and are based on standards promulgated by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), and other such entities.

The N95 masks issued to EMS services by the Rhode Island Department of Health several years ago were part of a program initiated by the Department in response to a potential North American outbreak of *Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome* (SARS). The masks supplied were 3M models #8210 and 8110S (the latter being just a smaller size of the former), which complied with SARS guidance provided by CDC at the time. Though 3M literature states that these masks "can help reduce inhalation exposures to certain airborne biological particles," users must be aware that the #8210/8110S masks are NOT specifically rated for protection against *M. tuberculosis* and this is not the purpose for which they were originally distributed.

The Department of Health requirements for N95 masks in the EMS environment should be viewed as a minimum standard, not as the definition of absolute protection against all airborne pathogens. At this time, any mask meeting the CDC's N95 standard, regardless of manufacturer or model, meets Department of Health minimum requirements for EMS use. However, like many items carried on EMS vehicles, individual services and providers must make their own decisions about the specific level of protection most appropriate to their needs.

As an example, an appropriate mask for healthcare workers (e.g., EMS personnel) where a higher level of protection against airborne infectious diseases is desired might be 3M's model #1860/1860S "Healthcare Particulate Respirator and Surgical Mask." This is what many hospital facilities commonly stock and provide to EMS services for re-supply. Or, when encountering high exposure risks, EMS personnel should consider utilizing the Level-C PPE now available on every transporting EMS vehicle in Rhode Island.

Regardless of what model N95 masks a service utilizes, it should be noted that OSHA 29 CFR 1910 requires masks to be used in conjunction with implementation of a written respiratory protection plan and a fit-test program that covers the mask models available to personnel.

For your convenience, 3M technical data bulletin #174: *Respiratory Protection Against Biohazards* has been made available in our online library at <http://www.health.ri.gov/hsr/professions/ems/documents.php>. Additional information is available from CDC (<http://www.cdc.gov>) and OSHA (<http://www.osha.gov>).